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ABSTRACT

This booklet sets forth the position of the National Education Association on nontraditional routes to teacher licensure. The value of alternative preparation programs is acknowledged, provided that they prepare individuals to meet the same standards for entry to the profession applicable to all other candidates. Two distinctions are made: (1) a nontraditional route does not lead to an "alternative license"; and (2) nontraditional routes are distinguished from traditional routes only in the target audience, the training design, and the length of training, not in program content, rigor, or expected outcomes. Details of a nontraditional program are discussed, and guidelines are presented for nontraditional routes to licensure. Guidelines are also offered for intern/mentor programs. (JD)

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Ensuring High Standards in Nontraditional Routes to Licensure

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Developed by the NEA
Standing Committee on Instruction
and Professional Development

July 1990

This report and guidelines were adopted by the 1990 NEA Representative Assembly.

Recent focus on the issue of nontraditional routes to teacher licensure prompted the NEA Board of Directors in May 1989 to adopt the following motion:

> **To study the issue of nontraditional routes to state licensure, and to recommend a position to the NEA Board of Directors to be submitted for action to the 1990 Representative Assembly.**

The NEA Standing Committee on Instruction and Professional Development (IPD Committee) subsequently was charged with responsibility for meeting the terms of this action. This report summarizes the committee's examination of the issue and presents its recommendations.

The committee studied the NEA Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives, the December 1988 Final Report of the Special Committee on Restructuring, existing NEA policy, and recent, relevant policy statements adopted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE).[1] Existing local, area, and statewide nontraditional route programs were also researched.

[1] The AACTE statement on "Alternative Preparation for Licensure" was adopted in August 1989. ATE's paper, adopted in October 1989, is titled "Alternatives, Yes. Lower Standards, No! Minimum Standards for Alternative Teacher Certification Programs." Both documents acknowledge the value of alternative preparation programs for licensure, provided they prepare individuals to meet the same standards for entry to the profession applicable to all other candidates.

Any discussion of nontraditional routes to licensure must be placed in the context of a single, overriding Association objective: to ensure that every professional position in the schools is filled by a fully qualified and licensed educator.[2] This hallmark of NEA policy on professional issues—developed at a time when "traditional" programs were predominant—guided the committee's approach to its charge. Nontraditional routes to licensure offer *an additional opportunity to ensure* that the Association's objective is met.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

Two distinctions must be made at the outset. First, a nontraditional route does *not* lead to an "alternative license." Many alternative license programs result in lower standards for entry to the profession; they enable untrained or inadequately trained individuals to engage in classroom practice. The IPD Committee's charge has nothing to do with this phenomenon.

Second, nontraditional routes to licensure are distinguished from traditional routes only "in the target audience, the training design, and the length of training, *not* [emphasis added] in program content, rigor or expected outcomes."[3] The objective of *both* traditional and nontraditional routes to licensure is the same: to rigorously prepare an individual to obtain a *standard, full* teaching license. Nontraditional routes thus maintain high standards for licensure and for entry to the profession. They also imply and must be linked to (a) restructured teacher preparation programs, (b) restructured schools, and (c) restructured relationships between higher education and pre-K through 12 faculty.

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[2] The NEA has defined the term *licensure* in its policy document titled, "Establishing and Maintaining Standards for the Governance of the Teaching Profession," adopted by the NEA Board of Directors in 1987. Licensure is a state function whereby an agency of state government grants permission to persons meeting predetermined state qualifications to practice the education profession. Licensure takes place when a state's predetermined standards for entry-level practice are met; it enables an individual to obtain a teaching position in pre-K through grade 12 education.

[3] "Alternative Preparation for Licensure," AACTE, August 1989.

There is compelling reason to encourage and enable qualified individuals to achieve full licensure through carefully structured nontraditional route programs. Establishment of these programs can serve to enrich the pool of qualified candidates for professional teaching positions. For example, current instructional assistants and other educational support personnel with bachelor's degrees could use a nontraditional route to become fully licensed to perform a service with which they already are familiar.

DISCUSSION

Demographic profiles of the teaching population underscore the dangerously diminishing numbers of minorities actively teaching or preparing to enter the teaching field. There is also a continuing and substantial need for fully licensed professionals in such subject matter fields as mathematics, science, foreign languages, and special education. Nontraditional routes can increase the chances that mid-career professionals in other fields will consider teaching a viable option for a career change.

Arthur E. Wise, former director of the RAND Corporation's Center for the Study of the Teaching Profession, has observed that most teacher education is offered in the context of a four-year, undergraduate program and thus is not particularly accessible to individuals who already hold undergraduate (and possibly graduate) degrees in other fields. Nontraditional route programs can increase access to professional preparation for teaching by decoupling professional studies (e.g., adolescent psychology and learning styles) from the undergraduate curriculum. Those with degrees and experience in other fields must have specific training for teaching, but traditional forms and sequences of teacher preparation are not always appropriate or readily available. Nontraditional routes acknowledge and address the changing needs and career patterns of these professionals by adapting the *design* of teacher preparation to differing needs and by presenting more flexible alternatives.

Efforts to expand the pool of fully qualified, licensed teachers through the introduction of nontraditional route programs also may serve to interrupt the historical tendency to temporarily lower standards to meet shortages. Typical state and

district responses to spot shortages consist of seeking waivers, issuing temporary, emergency, or other substandard credentials, or misassigning teachers out of field. If pools of fully qualified, licensed teachers are expanded to meet anticipated needs, the alleged need to issue substandard credentials will be eliminated—and another NEA goal in the professionalization of teaching will be achieved.

THE NONTRADITIONAL ROUTE PROGRAM AND THE TEACHER CANDIDATE

Specific details of a nontraditional route program should be designed with the full involvement of all stakeholders—practicing teachers, the Association, administrators, teacher educators, and, where appropriate, state legislators, the state education agency, and the state professional standards board. Existing nontraditional route programs are highly varied and frequently complex. The levels at which they are created (e.g., statewide, on a regional basis, between individual school districts and higher education institutions) also vary widely, as do agreements on roles and responsibilities, funding, recruitment and selection practices, length of program, commitments to candidates, and so on.

If legitimate, viable nontraditional route programs are to be designed and adopted, broad stakeholder understanding, commitment, and support are crucial. Implementation of such programs (depending upon the level at which they are constructed) may require appropriate state statutory or regulatory action once the program parameters are determined. In addition, some implementation issues may require agreements between a local bargaining agent/Association and a school district.

To enter a nontraditional route program, a candidate should have at least a bachelor's degree in a subject matter field. He or she could be a mid-career professional or an educational support person who holds a bachelor's degree and who is changing fields after any number of years of work experience.

Before entering the classroom, the teacher candidate must receive substantial training in pedagogy. This could be accomplished through taking traditional coursework or through a restructured teacher education program specially designed for nontradi-

tional route candidates. The instruction should, however, be conducted in conjunction with a state-approved college or university teacher education program. The amount of coursework and amount of time spent with students before the candidate enters the classroom would be decided by the entities developing the program.

Once a candidate begins working with students in the classroom, he or she must be supervised by a fully licensed, trained mentor and evaluated frequently. The mentor program should correspond with the guidelines found in the NEA policy statement, "Intern/Mentor Programs: Definitions and Guidelines," adopted by the 1988 Representative Assembly. This teacher candidate is *not* a student teacher, *not* a fully licensed educator, and *not* an educational support person. He or she is something else—*a professional, working within a limited scope of practice.*

The degree of classroom responsibility assigned to the teacher candidate must be directly proportionate to the amount of pedagogical training the candidate has received and his or her experience with students. At the beginning of classroom practice, the candidate likely will have very limited responsibilities, will require close and frequent support from a mentor, and will engage in continued pedagogical training. As classroom experience is gained, however, the balance will shift: the candidate can assume more responsibility, may require less or a different form of mentoring support, and will be completing necessary pedagogical training. Under no circumstances should the teacher candidate be given unilateral authority as the teacher of record for a classroom until he or she is fully licensed.

When beginning a limited scope of practice in the classroom, the teacher candidate should be a school district employee and should become eligible for full Association membership, thereby receiving liability insurance and other membership benefits. The stakeholders developing the program should agree upon minimum salary and benefits for teacher candidates, as well as maximum length of time permitted for work within the program. The bargaining agent/Association and the school district should settle by agreement such other labor relations issues as candidates' bargaining unit sta-

tus, the maximum number of teacher candidates to be employed at one time, how candidates are to be paid, and the conditions of the mentorship program.

The teacher candidate must complete the requirements of the program within a specified length of time. At the end of that time, representatives of the institution of higher education and the school district administration must determine whether the candidate has completed the program successfully and is ready to apply for a full license. To become fully licensed, the candidate must achieve the same state standards as those required of traditional route teachers.

GUIDELINES FOR NONTRADITIONAL ROUTES TO LICENSURE

The NEA Standing Committee on Instruction and Professional Development recommends that when the stakeholders in a state determine the need for a nontraditional route program, the NEA and its affiliates should insist upon compliance with the following requirements:[4]

1. All stakeholders—practicing teachers, the Association, administrators, teacher educators, state legislators, the state education agency, and the state standards board—must be involved in the systematic planning of a particular state's nontraditional route.
2. A candidate must complete a program of pedagogical study and demonstrate a thorough knowledge base in both subject matter and pedagogy before a teaching license is issued. Until such time, the candidate pursuing a nontraditional route shall be referred to as a "limited scope of practice professional," a "teacher candidate," a "prospective teacher," or a title other than "teacher."
3. No teacher candidate should be allowed unilateral authority for a group of students. Service to students must not be disrupted or diminished.
4. The teacher candidate's compensation and benefits and the maximum length of his or her

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[4] The committee recognizes that certain recommendations made here may require expansion or clarification of present Association policy and bylaws by the appropriate Association bodies.

employment must be decided during development of the program. The bargaining agent/Association must decide jointly with the school district how many teacher candidates will be employed at any one time and the sources of necessary funding.

5. High standards must be maintained for entry into the program. A candidate must have at least a bachelor's degree in a subject matter.

6. The professional studies component of a nontraditional route program must be conducted in conjunction with a state-approved college or university teacher education program.

7. The teacher candidate must be eligible for full membership in the Association.

8. Extensive support systems for the teacher candidate must be provided by veteran educators serving as mentors by agreement of the bargaining agent/Association and the local school district. Any mentor program should correspond with the guidelines adopted by NEA in 1988.[5]

9. The teacher candidate must be evaluated frequently and must be given the time necessary to truly learn both what to teach and how to teach it.

10. To become fully licensed, a nontraditionally prepared candidate must achieve the same state standards in basic skills, subject matter, and pedagogy as those required of traditional route teachers. All program and state testing requirements must be passed within a specified length of time. Assessment should be conducted with multiple assessment procedures.

11. Emergency, irregular, or substandard licenses, together with misassignments out of field, must be eliminated in all forms.

12. Nontraditional routes to licensure should supplement, not supplant, traditional routes.

13. Nontraditional route programs should be regularly assessed to determine their validity and effectiveness in preparing individuals for teaching and then be redesigned as necessary.

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[5] "Intern/Mentor Programs: Definitions and Guidelines" was developed by the Standing Committee on IPD and adopted by the 1988 Representative Assembly.

APPENDIX

INTERN/MENTOR PROGRAMS: GUIDELINES

Following are the basic considerations for structuring and operating intern/mentor programs, as taken from an NEA policy document adopted by the 1988 NEA Representative Assembly and titled "Intern/Mentor Programs: Definitions and Guidelines":

1. An internship program should be an integral and required part of professional licensure.
2. An internship program must assure that its graduates possess the skills, knowledge and clinical judgment required for independent professional practice.
3. Internships should be carefully structured around an explicit curriculum focused on the common needs of new educators, but remain flexible enough to address the individual needs of beginning educators as they adjust to their particular professional assignments.
4. Local districts should make a carefully planned internship available to all beginning educators so they receive the support from experienced colleagues required for a successful transition from preparation to practice.
5. Local school districts or any other sponsoring organization, including an institution of higher education, should provide sufficient time, financial, resource and administrative support for the operation of an intern/mentor program.
6. Support for interns/mentors, including recognition that the intern/mentor relationship is one of formative assistance, should be provided by school building administrators as part of their responsibility to support the development of new and practicing educators.
7. An intern/mentor program should operate within parameters agreed to by the school district and the local professional organization. Where a master contract is in effect, all aspects of the program should be included within the scope of that agreement.
8. New and practicing educators in a district should receive printed copies of the selection procedures and operating guidelines of the intern/mentor program.

9. The effectiveness of an intern/mentor program should be evaluated periodically so the program can be improved.
10. The state or local professional organization should be involved at all stages of an intern/mentor program: development, implementation, assistance, evaluation, and improvement.
11. Intern/mentor assignments should be made by mutual consent of the individuals to be paired.
12. Mentors should be selected by their peers, particularly those in the same specialty or area of certification, to assure the selection of individuals with the requisite pedagogical and subject-matter expertise.
13. Interns and mentors should practice in the same education specialty or area of certification, have compatible ideologies and personalities, and when possible, be located in the same building.
14. Interns and mentors should have time built into their schedules for formal and informal meetings during the school day.
15. Interns should be relieved of as many additional duties and responsibilities not directly related to their professional assignment as possible so they have time to learn the principles of effective practice.
16. Mentors should receive training at district expense to prepare them for their role so they are fully equipped to facilitate the intern's entry into the school setting.
17. Mentors should fulfill professional development requirements related to their area of specialization or certification so they maintain the currency and high level of expertise their role requires.
18. Mentors should be concerned with the professional development of the beginning educator exclusively, and, as such, their activities should be separated from the evaluation role of school districts and the information they gather concerning an intern's performance should be confidential.

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